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THE RELATION OF LANGUAGE TO THE MOTOR PROCESSES.

THE child's receptive sensory experiences are much greater in number than his motor attitudes. The numerous elements of his environment pour in upon him through his senses; he is attracted by people, objects, and activities innumerable, but his intimate relations with these through direct participation in their qualities and activities are limited.

His first motor adjustments are formed in response to his mother's care, and in endeavoring to manipulate playthings and food. With these he feels an intimacy gained chiefly through tactual and muscular adjustment. Mother is to him a presence which in its movements and touch calls from him those bodily attitudes and feelings which harmonize with his need of loving, protecting care. The ball is more a thing which his fingers curve around, which yields to pressure, which causes his eyes to move up and down as it bounces, or to follow as it rolls, than an objective thing of color or mass. Thus it happens that, as the ever-varying elements of his environment continually assail him through his senses, he tends to react to all of these through his few acquired motor adjustments. He gathers into a class or concept many things which upon closer relationship he finds call from him motor attitudes different from those through which he felt he understood them. The apple is a ball until his active acquaintance with it calls into being new sensations, new motor adjustments. The child's first words, therefore, stand for vague concepts, but later, as he discovers that all the elements of his concept do not assimilate with his motor attitude, that the apple does not bounce when thrown on the floor, that it is not forthcoming in its fragrant sweetness when called for as ball, but that it calls forth from him new activities, his ideas of identity tend to become corrected, and objects possessing for him more of individuality detach themselves from his first concept. Through new motor adjustments he discriminates more and more clearly,

discovering differences, particulars, as well as resemblances, generals, acquiring percepts out of concepts, each percept, however, forming the basis for a new concept. Ball no longer includes apples and oranges; these now have life-meaning to him through his active experience with their individual properties of color, odor, softness, sweetness, juiciness, and structure. Thus, as his motor attitudes become more numerous, his classes become more numerous, through constant motor testing they are continually subject to change and correction, until finally he finds that there are certain experiences, certain elements, which under all conditions call out from him the same reactions. This sameness of motor feeling is the test of identity, and objects calling it forth are to him identical and form a true concept.

Language then registers or formulates in thought these motor attitudes, words increasing, as classes increase, by individuals separating from classes, and in turn becoming the bases for new classes. And only in so far as words may be interpreted through life-experience are they available as forms of expression through which to impart or acquire thought.

Dr. Dewey, in *The Primary-Education Fetich*, warns against the "isolation of material found in books from the material which the child experiences in life itself—the forcing of the former upon the child before he has well organized powers of dealing with the latter." Our analysis of the child's acquisition of words gives us an insight into the reasons for Dr. Dewey's position regarding too early reading or study from books.

The presentation of words to the child before he has had experience with the realities which the words stand for cannot fail to result in a vague or altogether wrong conception of them. Like his first experience with things, he will interpret words through wrong motor channels, or some one word which has motor significance for him will influence his thought to such an extent as to dominate the sentence, giving him a wrong construction; or words will become mere memory forms, with no motor link connecting them with life. This last state would seem to explain the condition of children who learn to read readily, but who lack appreciation of what they read; they acquire the power

of remembering the forms of words, which have little or no life-content for them.

The acquisition of empty or vague words tends to develop satisfaction in trivial or fanciful interpretations, and a feeling of helplessness in dealing with content, which for the mind sensitive to meanings is rich with wholesome truth. And because the power of keen appreciation is lacking or defective, as Dr. Dewey states, there is a "tendency to elevate the sensational and transiently interesting above the valuable and permanent." Reading degenerates into a habit of passively viewing trains of images and situations, which, being sedative in nature, do not tend to inspire thought, do not arouse the mind to a questioning attitude concerning true ideas of life.

In line with the analysis of the acquisition of meaning in words, one concludes that much oral expression regarding things of actual experience in the child's life will develop in him a feeling for the meaning of words — words which, when heard or uttered, will tingle with feeling of actual life-relations — a condition of appreciation attained only through having lived the experience or state which the word expresses.

Fruitful of such results are the free discussions arising from planting seeds, from watching their growth, participating in their delights of flower or fruit, and investigating their methods of perpetuation. Not less inspiring to thought and talk are the hours devoted to contriving and constructing objects of use and interest to the children. The consultations over devices for overcoming difficulties, or the plans formed for enjoying the finished product, necessitate an oral expression born of the needs and pleasures of co-operation.

The improved conditions in our primary grades where the little children are no longer doomed to writing, numbers, and silence, are encouraging, but are we not even yet too prone to think that the book is the all-important factor in school education, and the number of pages mastered at an early date the mark of real progress? Should we not afford opportunity for more varied self-activity and thought, as it evolves in games, in study of nature, in construction of objects and in social intercourse?

It seems reasonable to think that after a large experience in such oral expression, where language is ever the utterance of truths fraught with life-experience, the child would easily and naturally turn to written language, literature suited to his experience, and, through a well-established habit of expressing thought, in turn appropriate the thought as thus presented.

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